

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Child and Family Services Agency**



Testimony of

**Brenda Donald Walker, Director**

**D.C. Child and Family Services Agency**

District Council Public Oversight Hearing: Juvenile Homicides in the District of Columbia  
January 31, 2005

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Good morning. I am Brenda Donald Walker, director of the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency. Thank you for your concern about how violence is affecting children and teens in our city. For some time, we have been aware of and alarmed about the tragic impact of juvenile homicides on far too many young people who have had some involvement with our agency. I have some disturbing facts to share with you about juvenile homicide victims known to CFSA. I'll then briefly describe the approaches CFSA is taking to improve services to youths in our care.

CFSA is serving a large number of young people, ages 13-21. Of the 2,600 children currently in out-of-home care, 1,140—or 43 percent—are ages 13 to 21. In the past, the child welfare system in the District was unorganized, unsupported, and overwhelmed. Children languished in the system. Today, we're working to move more children more quickly to safe, permanent homes with their parents, relatives, or adoptive parents. But in the meantime, we're serving a large number of teens who, as a result of the past, are growing up in the child welfare system. With 500 young people, ages 17 to 21, scheduled to age out of foster care over the next five years, this trend will continue for some time.

In the context of this discussion, it's important to point out that only a small number of our teens have what is known as a "dual jacket"—that is, concurrent involvement in both the child welfare and juvenile or adult justice systems. Of the 1,000-plus teens and young adults on our foster-care caseload today, only 40 have a dual jacket.

CFSA youth are too often the victims of juvenile homicide, but not the perpetrators.

Over the past few years, the growing incidence of violence in our community has directly affected too many children known to CFSA: 17 victims of juvenile homicide in 2002, 11 in 2003, and 23 in 2004. In addition, although CFSA's mission is to protect children from abuse and neglect primarily at the hands of parents or caretakers, the overwhelming majority of homicides of young people known to CFSA is not the result of abuse or neglect. The cause of most of these homicides is gunshots. Last year, gunshots took the lives of 17 youths known to CFSA—and were the leading cause of death among children known to our agency. To add some details about these 17 victims of juvenile homicide by gunshot:

- 76 percent were males, and 70 percent were age 13 to 17;
- Five had duel jackets—two in the juvenile and three in the adult justice systems;
- Only two were in abscondence at the time of the homicide; and
- Four had open cases with CFSA.

Ten of these 17 homicides by gunshot in 2004 took place in Wards 5, 7, or 8.

I have a personal passion about young people and take seriously the responsibility to ensure that CFSA's population of youths in care gets the best start in life we can give them. In that regard, CFSA is actively pursuing the following five strategies.

1. We have recently consolidated several agency programs for youth under our Youth Development Administration to streamline and improve coordination of services. Our Center for the Keys for Life program engages foster teens in weekly meetings to build "life skills" such as money management, job hunting, conflict resolution, and personal discipline. This program is the foundation of CFSA's efforts to get our foster teens ready for independence.
2. We are starting earlier and working harder to ensure foster teens are prepared for independence when they leave the child welfare system at age 21. Seventy-five percent of those age 15 and older now have formal emancipation plans. We are also

engaging the Collaboratives in providing “after-care” outreach, counseling, and other assistance to young adults who have aged out of foster care.

3. In addition to active licensing and monitoring, CFSA is using contract requirements to hold providers more accountable for the safety and quality of services youth receive in group homes and Independent Living programs. Our youth need and deserve more than just room and board. Today, we’re involving providers in helping foster teens achieve the goals in their case plans.
4. CFSA continues to have a unique and productive partnership with the Alliance of Concerned Men to locate and counsel runaway foster teens with the goal of returning them to care. This group brings both cultural competence and “street smarts” to a tough job, and their assistance is invaluable.
5. Last week, the D.C. Department of Mental Health launched three new services that will provide intensive, professional intervention and counseling to CFSA children and teens with serious emotional, mental, and behavioral difficulties. These services greatly expand our options for keeping young people out of foster care and residential treatment and, over time, should reduce the number of placement disruptions and runaways.

In addition, we are actively seeking donors to support our teens in large and small ways. As you know, Capital One has launched a scholarship program for foster youth, with 10 percent of the funding earmarked for the District. CFSA has a donation campaign underway to outfit every college-bound or college-enrolled young adult on our caseload with necessities such as sheets, towels, and computers.

I have recently established a Youth Advisory Committee for the purposes of taking a critical look at CFSA’s programs and services for our older youth and to develop a comprehensive and strategic approach to improving outcomes for these youth. With the assistance of our committee

members, which include judges and child welfare advocates, I am confident that we will be able to strengthen services and improve outcomes for our older youth.

Thank you for your past and continuing commitment and support to youth in the District of Columbia. I look forward to answering any questions.



CFSA's caseload includes a large number of youths, ages 13-21.

<b>All Children Involved with CFSA</b>		Point in time: Jan. 15, 2004
<b>Total</b>		<b>5,828</b>
• Monitored at home		3,195 (55%)
• In out-of-home placement		2,633 (45%)
<i>Source: CFSA FACES</i>		

<b>Youths, Ages 13-20, Involved with CFSA</b>		Point in time: Jan. 15, 2004
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,155</b>	<b>37% of total caseload</b>
<b>In out-of-home placement</b>	<b>1,140</b>	<b>43% of total out-of-home placements</b>
<i>Source: CFSA FACES</i>		

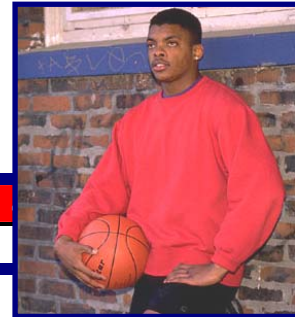
This trend will continue for several years.

<b>District Youths Projected to Age Out of Foster Care</b>		
<i>Year</i>	<i>No. Aging Out</i>	<i>Current Age of Group</i>
2005	6	21
2006	109	20
2007	144	19
2008	145	18
2009	150	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>554</b>	
<i>Source: CFSA FACES</i>		

Only a small number have “dual jackets.”

**Total Joint CFSA/Juvenile Justice Cases:**

Source: D.C. Superior Court Report NEGW024, 11/29/04



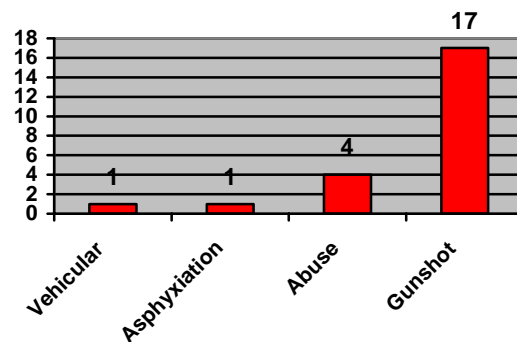
The majority of homicides of children and youth known to CFSA are not the result of child abuse or neglect.

**Note:** The court-ordered Final Implementation Plan in the *LaShawn v. Williams* lawsuit requires CFSA to review fatalities of all children known to the agency within the past four years. “Known” includes (1) past case now closed, (2) investigation only (case not opened), and (3) current active case.

Source: CFSA Quality Improvement Administration

In 2004, gunshots took the lives of 17 youths known to CFSA—the leading cause of death among children known to the agency.

**Causes of Homicides of Children Known to CFSA, 2004**



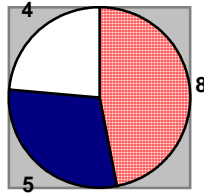
**Demographics of Youth Victims of Gunshot Homicides Known to CFSA, 2004**

<b>Total gunshot homicides</b>		<b>17</b>
<b>Age</b>		
• 13-17	12	(70%)
• 18-21	4	(24%)
• 22	1	(06%)
<b>Gender</b>		
• Male	13	(76%)
• Female	4	(24%)
<b>“Dual Jacket” Cases by Age</b>		
• 13-17	2	(12%)
• 18-21	3	(18%)
Total	5	(29%)
<b>In Abscondence at Time of Homicide</b>		
Total	2	(12%)

Source: CFSA Quality Improvement Administration



**Status of Youth Gunshot  
Victims with CFSA at Time of  
Homicides in 2004**



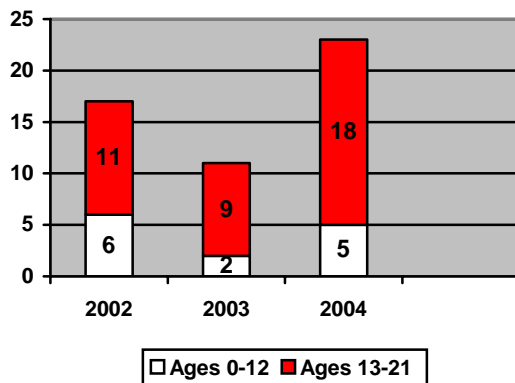
■ Closed ■ Investigation only □ Open

**Location of Homicides  
of Youth Gunshot Victims  
Known to CFSA, 2004**

Ward 2	2 (12%)
Ward 4	1 (05%)
Ward 5	4 (24%)
Ward 6	1 (05%)
Ward 7	3 (18%)
Ward 8	3 (18%)
Maryland	2 (12%)
Oklahoma	1 (05%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>17 (100%)</b>

Source:  
CFSA Quality Improvement Administration

**Homicides of Children  
Known to CFSA by Age,  
2002-2004**



Source: CFSA FACES

